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Chairperson

भारत सरकार
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
राष्ट्रीय बालक अधिकार संरक्षण आयोग
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR PROTECTION OF CHILD RIGHTS

D.O. No. 12012/01/2009 – NCPCR (PD)

25th June 2009

Dear Ms. Soma Gandhi,

Subject: Special Focus on Children in the Proposed Food Security Act

As you know, child malnutrition is one of the areas of concern in our country regarding which we have not yet made significant progress. The President's address mentions malnutrition as an area of concern by saying, "Malnutrition has emerged as a major health challenge needing urgent response. Hence the nutrition delivery programme will be comprehensively revamped to bring it under the watch of the panchayat institutions and move to provision of hot cooked meals in anganwadis." I was happy to note in the President's address to the Parliament the passing of a National Food Security Act as one of the priorities of the new Government. This can be a tremendous opportunity to put children's right to food and nutrition in the centre-stage, along with ensuring food security for the poor.

2. The main programmes addressing children's right to food in our country are the ICDS and the Mid day meal scheme. In fact ICDS, which has a comprehensive package of services relating to health, nutrition and development, is the only programme for children under six in the country. The 86th Amendment to the Constitution which made the Right to Education a fundamental right to the children, in this country, inadvertently left out children in the age group of 0-6. However it is well known now that in order to tackle malnutrition there must be a focus on children in this age group. I would therefore urge you ensure that the rights of children and their access to nutrition and health are included in the proposed Bill related to food security.

3. The following are some of the points relating to children that we think should be included in the Food Security Act:

- I. **Universalisation of ICDS:** Every village in the country should have access to an anganwadi centre which is open for all children under six. The ICDS should provide all its services including, supplementary nutrition and growth monitoring to all the children under six in its area of coverage. The ICDS program for pre-school education should be in a center as a part of the primary school and hot cooked meal for children is to be provided for children in this center.
- II. **Good Quality Nutrition:** The Bill should assure good quality, nutritious and locally produced food for children under six, pregnant and lactating mothers. While this can be in the form of take home rations for children under three and pregnant and lactating mothers, children in the 3 to 6 years age group who attend the anganwadi centre should be given hot cooked meals in the lines of the school Mid Day Meal Programme. Foodgrains should be provided from the Centre for this purpose, as is the case with the mid day meal scheme.
- III. **Infrastructure and human resources:** All anganwadis should have basic infrastructure such as a building, water and toilet facilities, weighing machines, utensils and plates etc. Further in order to provide the centre-based as well as community-based services effectively each anganwadi should have at least two anganwadi workers and an anganwadi helper. There

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must be an anganwadi worker separately for children in 3-6 years age group at the pre-school center.

- IV. **Crèches for children:** Most women in our country work and are working in the unorganised sector with no access to institutionalised forms of child care. Crèches are seen as an important intervention in addressing malnutrition. Crèche services must be provided to all working mothers, where young children are provided with food and care. Facilities should be provided for breastfeeding mothers to be able to feed their children at the work place, especially when children are less than 6 months old and need to be exclusively breastfed.
- V. **Breastfeeding counselling and support:** A child's right to food begins with access to breast milk from the time she is born. It is recommended that children should be exclusively breastfed up to six months of age with continued feeding up to two years. Exclusive breastfeeding rates in our country are very low. To encourage women to breastfeeding along with crèches, support services such as breastfeeding counselling and support must be made available at the village level.
- VI. **Mid day meals in schools:** The Mid day Meal Scheme is by far one of the most successful programmes of the Government today. While the Bill must guarantee this as a right to all school going children – it should also be further enhanced to include all school going children up to class X and quality further improved.

4. We do hope that you will take our suggestions forward to the highest level and make sure that this opportunity is utilised to ensure children's right to food.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

Shantha
(Shantha Sinha)

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